DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 113 RC 020 768

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TITLE The Inclusion Practice in Kentucky Rural Regular Schools.
PUB DATE Oct 96
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Rural Education Association (San Antonio, Texas, October 11-15, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; Professional Development; Program Evaluation; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; *Rural Education; Rural Schools; School Surveys; *Special Education; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Kentucky

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how inclusion services are delivered in Kentucky rural regular schools. Survey responses were received from special educators in 261 rural regular schools throughout Kentucky. Vocational schools, treatment centers, alternative schools, and other special schools were not included in the survey. Results indicate that approximately 80 percent of responding schools practiced some form of inclusion, with variations in program implementation in terms of severity of disability or time spent in the regular classroom. It was also found that inclusion practice has increased in Kentucky in recent years, although only seven schools practiced full inclusion and two were planning to adopt it. Findings indicate lack of: teacher preparation, supplementary support, collaboration, and special instructional materials for exceptional students in many regular classrooms. In many schools, the roles of school staff with regard to inclusion practice were not well defined. The majority of regular teachers and many special educators lacked training in providing inclusive services. Contains 34 references and the survey questionnaire. (Author/TD)

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ED 402 113

THE INCLUSION PRACTICE IN KENTUCKY RURAL REGULAR SCHOOLS

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Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Rural Education Association, San Antonio, Oct. 11-15, 1996.

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THE INCLUSION PRACTICE IN KENTUCKY RURAL REGULAR SCHOOLS

Abstract

How inclusion services are delivered in Kentucky rural regular schools was investigated through a survey study. The data collected represents information from 211 rural regular schools throughout Kentucky. Results indicate that approximately 80 percent of responding schools practice inclusion, with variations in program implementations in the schools. It was also found that inclusion practice has been increased in Kentucky rural regular schools. There is a lack of supplementary support, a lack of special instructional materials for exceptional students in many regular classrooms. With the inclusion practice, the roles of school staff are not defined in too many schools. The majority of regular teachers and many special educators lack training in providing the inclusive services.

THE INCLUSION PRACTICE IN KENTUCKY RURAL REGULAR SCHOOLS

The principle of least restrictive environment (LRE) has been the guide for special education professionals, since the passage of Education For All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). With this principle, whenever possible, students with disabilities must be educated with their normal peers. Because of the wide range of disabilities and levels of severity of children with disabilities, the law also stipulates that a continuum of alternative placements be provided.

However, in recent years, this practice of employing alternative placements has been under fire. The Regular Education Initiative (REI), as introduced in the mid 1980s, promotes placing all students with disabilities totally into the general education program in order for them to avoid the stigmatization, segregation and expenses that special education placements incur (Silver, 1991; Wang, 1987; Wang, Reynolds & Walberg, 1988; Wang, Rubenstein & Reynolds, 1985; Wang & Walberg, 1988).

Along with the REI movement, the ways special education services are delivered to children with disabilities have been changed notably in many places, such as Utah (Kulic, 1993) and Vermont (Thousand & Villa, 1990). However, the REI appears to be less uniformly implemented. Some programs reflect real collaboration between special education and general education. In

other instances, educational administrators seem to disagree with the REI concept, and they have placed all students with disabilities (or fully include them) in general education programs with little collaboration supporting their instructional needs and services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

In literature, inclusion seems to have multiple meanings. Inclusion sometimes is referred to as mainstreaming (Salisbury, 1991). Inclusion also refers to specific service delivery models (Sailor, 1991). Some authors use the terms integration, mainstreaming, inclusion interchangeably, referring to serving students with or without disabilities in the same settings on a part- or full-time basis (Miller, 1996). However, in recent years, inclusion is mostly referred to full or total inclusion of all students with disabilities in regular classrooms (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

For the research projects reported in literature, full inclusion rarely means fully include all students with disabilities in regular classrooms. In their experimental projects, researchers fully included only students with certain category of disabilities, not totally included all students with disabilities in the regular classrooms, such as fully including students with specific learning disabilities (Banerji & Dailey, 1995; Berckers & Carnes, 1995; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1995; Yeager, 1995), elementary students with mild disabilities (Fuller, Ronning, VanVoorhis & Moore, 1993), students with severe disabilities (Alper & Ryndak, 1992; Beckstead, Hunt, Goetz & Karasoff, 1992; Passaro, Guskey & Zahn,

1994; Rainforth, 1992; Vandercook, York, Sullivan, Montie & Wolff, 1993); and middle grade students with severe learning and behavioral problems (Din, 1996). For these research projects, inclusion seems to mean "fully include students with some type or level of disabilities, not all students with disabilities in regular classrooms." And mixed results were found with those projects.

For the improvement of inclusion practice, some researchers take a conservative approach and apply the LER concept. In their experimental project, Fuchs and colleagues (1992) attempted to transition 42 pupils with mild and moderate disabilities (most with learning disabilities) out of math instruction in resource rooms and into regular education math. The process utilized computerized curriculum-based measurement to teach math operations in both special and regular classrooms. The teaching methods included goal setting, repeated measurement on goal material, and evaluation of the database to adjust instructional programs. The trans-environmental programming involved four phases: environmental assessment, intervention and preparation, promoting transfer across settings, and evaluation in the mainstream. Evaluation indicated that experimental students outperformed controls in math achievement. Whereas all 21 experimental students reintegrated into mainstream math settings either full- or part-time, not a single control student did so. In this experimental inclusion project, inclusion was implemented in light with the least restrictive environment concept (Osborne & DiMattia, 1992; Texas Education

Agency, 1991).

In a survey study (paired with interviews), Betancourt-Smith (1992) found that with the mainstreaming practices in the sampled high schools, few accommodative strategies for LD students are being used, and little or no training is offered for teaching students with disabilities of any sort, and administrators, operating under constraints imposed by governmental agencies, while complying with the law, are not allocating the resources that would provide the training, supervision, materials, and/or personnel that would help them use accommodative strategies. This study shows that in the implementation of mainstreaming programs, many areas remain to be improved. It seems that for the mainstreaming practice to work the way it should, it takes more than making placement changes.

As the literature shows, inclusion means different things to different people. Some educators want a continuum of placements, while others want a continuum of supports (Willis, 1994). Research on inclusion employing the LER principle or taking a conservative approach is scarce. In literature, the impact of REI on LRE has been mainly shown by the full inclusion practices (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Kulic, 1993; Thousand & Vila, 1990). Outside the full inclusion programs, research on such impact is limited.

It is known that the current Kentucky education reform movement is not about special education, but general education. From the educational research perspective, it is important to know that with the REI movement, what changes, if any, have occurred to

the special education service delivery system in Kentucky rural regular schools in the context of the general education reform movement.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of REI on the special education service delivery system in Kentucky rural regular schools in the context of the statewide education reform movement. Specifically, it is to examine how inclusion services are presently delivered in Kentucky rural regular schools in the context of the statewide educational reform movement. Inclusion in this study means similarly as the LRE does (Osborne & DiMattia, 1992; Texas Education Agency, 1991).

Method

A survey study was conducted in March, 1996, to collect data needed for the research questions of this investigation, with the assumption that data collected from the survey would provide adequate information to serve the purpose of this study. Specific procedures for this project are as follows.

Participants

The special educators (full time employees) in Kentucky rural regular schools were surveyed. Special educators in the special schools, vocational schools, technical schools, treatment centers, alternative schools, preschool centers, etc. were not selected for the survey, because the special education service programs in those schools are not considered to be comparable with those in the regular schools.

Procedures

Sampling was conducted via the Kentucky Schools Directory (1994-95). One special educator from each rural regular school was surveyed. Totally, 1,047 rural regular schools in Kentucky were selected.

The survey package was sent to any "special education faculty" of a selected school. With the directory, the school addresses are available, participants' names are unknown. The survey envelopes were addressed as: Special Education Faculty, plus a specific school address.

Instrument

Two types of issues were addressed in the questionnaire: type 1 was related to whether the school is practicing full inclusion or inclusion; type two was related to how the inclusion services are delivered in each school (see Appendix).

The following issues were identified from literature or the theoretical framework, and were considered to have close relationships to the research question, and these were addressed respectively in the survey questions:

Present ways of service delivery (Fuchs & Fuchs 1994);

Inclusion of children with moderate and severe disabilities (Vandercook, York, Sullivan, Montie & Wolff, 1993);

Availability of a continuum of programs in the school district (Cates & Yell, 1994);

Availability of alternative placements in the school (Wigle, Wilcox & Manges, 1994);

Any change in the number of special education programs in the district (Wigle, Wilcox & Manges, 1994);

Availability of school-level support team (Schrag, 1993);

Role defining for school staff members (Fox & Williams, 1991);

Pre-training for regular teachers and special educators for the inclusion practice (Monteith, 1996; Schrag, 1993);

Availability of instructional materials for special needs students in regular classrooms (Schrag, 1993);

Types of supplementary aides available in regular classrooms (Fox & Williams, 1991);

Forms of support to students with disabilities and teachers in regular classrooms (Fox & Williams, 1991);

Instructional strategies being used in regular classrooms (Fox & Williams, 1991);

Teachers' judgement about the effectiveness of inclusion on the learning of students with disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995);

The questionnaire used a multiple choice type question and answeres (see Appendix). A cover letter introducing the purpose of this survey accompanied the questionnaire. The participants were informed that this survey was anonymous and they could choose to skip any question that did not apply to their school situation.

Results

1,047 survey packages, each with a postage-paid reply envelope, were sent out to special educators in the selected Kentucky rural regular schools in early March, 1996. 261 schools (special educators) throughout Kentucky responded. The return rate is approximately 25 percent. The results were summarized from the responses to the issues listed in the Instrument section.

Results indicate that there are two major types of special education service delivery systems currently being practiced in Kentucky rural regular schools: inclusion (LER--placement decision is made based on individual need basis) and full inclusion (in which students with disabilities are placed for full school time in regular classrooms).

The data indicate that presently inclusion remains to be the major type of special education service practice adopted by the majority of Kentucky rural regular schools. Approximately 80 percent of them (N=211) practice inclusion (LRE). Specific information on the implementation of special education service programs in these schools are provided as follows.

Results show that in those schools adopting the inclusion type of service, the extent of inclusion in terms of time length or severity of disability varies from school to school. The majority of the schools include (in regular settings) only students with mild disabilities; approximately 30 percent of them include

students with mild and moderate disabilities; 15 percent of the schools include students with all levels of disabilities to some extent.

Two thirds of the schools reported that there were more special education service programs now in their districts, approximately 24 percent of the schools noted that there were fewer special education service programs now in their districts, and approximately 6 percent of them indicated that the number of special education service programs remained unchanged.

Collaboration was found to be in practice in 22 percent of the schools. More than half of the regular teachers involved in inclusion service programs either have limited training or little (none) training for this practice.

Special instructional materials for disabled students are not available in regular classrooms in 55 percent of the schools. In inclusive settings, special education teachers and teaching aides are the most commonly seen supplementary support in regular classrooms, and only less than half of the schools have access to some special equipments needed by students with disabilities in regular classrooms.

The roles for school staff involved in inclusion practices were either ambiguously or not defined at all in over 60 percent of the schools. That special education teachers work directly with disabled students in regular classrooms and routinely support the regular teachers are found to be the most commonly used instructional methods. Over half of the special education teachers

reported that sometimes it took a while to get into a situation in the regular classrooms. Approximately half of them note that the current special education service delivery system does not meet the needs of the disabled students in their schools.

Seven of the schools practiced Full Inclusion before. And two schools reported that they would adopt Full Inclusion next year. One special education teacher reported that in their middle school one student with mild mental retardation was not allowed to participate in any kind of activity with normal peers in school.

Discussion

The data show that Kentucky rural regular schools are practicing more inclusion in the context of the general educational reform movement, which may be due to the impact of the REI movement. For the schools with inclusion service programs, teacher preparation remains a serious problem. Comparatively, special education teachers are better prepared than regular teachers, even though a large number of special education teachers are not adequately trained for providing this service. It appears that staff training for implementing inclusion programs needs to be on the priority list of school professional development programs.

The reality that special instructional materials for students with disabilities in regular classrooms are not available in more than 55 percent of the regular schools may constitute a serious obstacle to the learning of students with special needs. Without the special instructional materials, it is difficult for regular

teachers and special education teachers to give students with disabilities the help they need. Most probably this condition is related to budgetary problem, as is the reduction of special education service programs in many Kentucky rural school districts. That some Kentucky school districts have created more special education service programs, some have cut service programs in special education suggests that the access of students with disabilities in Kentucky rural regular schools to special education service programs varies from district to district.

That special education teachers provide direct instructional help to students with disabilities in regular classrooms should not be considered a good strategy for every school. A variety of subject matters are offered in middle schools and high schools. It is unlikely that special education teachers are qualified to teach in every academic area.

Without clearly defining the roles of participating school staff in inclusion service, it is unlikely that each staff member is providing the service to the mainstreamed students with disabilities the way she or he should. In implementing any educational program in schools, it is essential that the roles of participating staff be clearly defined.

All these problems existing in inclusion practices in Kentucky rural regular schools boil down to one issue: Schools need to address educational quality for students with disabilities while implementing inclusion programs.

The 25 percent return rate is low by any standard. However,

the data collected for this study are considered representative, because the stamped zip codes on the returned mail represent almost all Kentucky 3-digit zip codes. In addition, the results of this study were summarized with the first arrived 90 percent of the data. The additional 10 percent data did not provide information that warrants changes to the original major findings of this study.

Conclusion

The results suggest that presently or in the context of the statewide general education reform movement, inclusion employing the LRE principal is still the main type of special education service practice in Kentucky rural regular schools. Increased inclusion practices are found in these schools, which may be due to the impact of the REI movement. Data also indicate that in many Kentucky rural school districts, the number of special education service programs has been reduced, while in others increased programs have been reported. Lack of collaboration, lack of special instructional materials and lack of supplementary aides in regular classrooms remain serious problems for quality education for students with disabilities. In too many schools, regular teachers and special education teachers are not adequately prepared to work in inclusive settings, and neither regular teachers nor special education teachers know their roles in the inclusion practices.

In summary, presently in Kentucky rural regular schools, in the services provided to the mainstreamed students with disabilities, staff training, collaboration, access to special instructional

materials and supplementary supports, staff role clarification, etc. are found to be the problem areas of the special education service delivery system that need to be improved.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Check all questions that apply, please.
Your school: Elementary____; Middle____; High____.

1. Is your school presently practicing inclusion (LRE)____, or full inclusion____?

   In what year did your school adopt full inclusion? _____

2. Your school is now practicing: more___, about the same___, less___ inclusion.

3. Who initiated this full inclusion? (Check the ones that apply):
   * Leaders of district___; * School administrators___;
   * School board___; * Parents___;
   * Regular teachers___; * Special Ed teachers___;
   * Other (specify)_____.

4. In your school district, is a continuum of service programs currently available? Yes_____; No_____;

   In your school, is a continuum of alternative placements currently available? Yes___; No___;

5. What do you think is the main belief for adopting full inclusion? (Check the one(s) that apply):
   * To improve disabled students' learning_____;
   * To promote their social interaction_____;
   * To save money___;
   * Just to make some change under educational reform_____;
   * Special education is no longer needed_____;
   * Other (specify)_____.

6. Has your school fully included students with moderate disabilities? Y___; N___; And those with severe disabilities? Y___; N___;

7. In your school district, are there more or fewer service programs for students with disabilities? More_____; Fewer_____;

8. Is there a collaboration team in your school working for the (full) inclusion practice? Yes_____; No_____;

9. How much training did regular teachers in your school receive for (full) inclusion? Adequate___; Some___; limited___; little___;

   How about special ed. teachers?
   Adequate____; Some_____; Limited_____; Little_____;

10. Are materials needed for disabled students available in regular classrooms? Yes_____; No_____;

11. What supplementary aides are currently available in your school to regular teachers and special needs students? (Check all that apply)
    Teaching aides____; Special ed teachers_____;
    Volunteers____; Special equipments____;
    Other (specify)_____;
    None of the above available at all_____;

12. How were the roles defined for all staff in your school involved in (full) inclusion?
Clearly___; Somewhat clear___; Ambiguously___; Not defined at all___;

13. How were parents explained about the related IEP changes prior to this full inclusion?
Fully clear____; Somewhat clear_____;
Ambiguously____; Not explained at all_____;

14. To your knowledge, how did people react to the full inclusion in your school?

	Favor				Dislike	Don't know
Administrators	1	2	3	4	5	6
Regular teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
Special ed teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
Disabled students	1	2	3	4	5	6
Other parents	1	2	3	4	5	6

15. With respect to the responses of parents with disabled child to full inclusion, (Use the codes below, check the ones that apply.)
Most parents ___
Some parents ___
Few parents ___
No parent ___

Codes: 1 = support(s) it fully;
2 = support(s) it reluctantly;
3 = have no idea about it but go along with it anyway;
4 = oppose (s) it.
5 = I can not tell.

16. The teaching strategies that are being used by regular teachers in your school for (full) inclusion include: (Check the ones that apply.)
Team teaching___; Peer teaching; Adapted curriculum___;
Special ed. teacher's routine support to regular teachers___;
Special ed teacher working routinely and directly with special needs students in regular classrooms____:
Nothing special for the disabled students____;
Other (specify)_____;

17. As you go to work daily with the special needs students in regular classrooms, you often feel that (Check the ones that apply.)

1. you can give them help immediately____;
2. sometimes it takes a while to get into situation____;
3. you don't know enough to help them in some subjects____;

18. To your knowledge, are there any organizational beliefs and values in your school on how to serve students with disabilities?
Yes_____; No_____;

19. To your knowledge, with the current special education service delivery system, are the individual educational needs of the disabled students in your school better met?
Yes____; No_____:

Thank you very much for your cooperation!